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There are many people out there who helped shape an industry that would become one of Web Master Jimmy's most beloved hobbies, but there's only one Verne Langdon!

I've thought a lot about how to introduce this interview, but I can't - it speaks for itself. I can, however, tell you that Verne Langdon is a man who's not afraid of chasing his dreams and living out every boyhood fantasy you can think of, from monster maker to circus clown, from magician to brutish wrestler. I can tell you he *insists* on capitalizing words like "Family" and "Friends," and his email text is big, bold, and multi-colored. This is a guy who loves life, always has, and cherishes just about everything that comes his way. Enthusiasm is one word that comes to mind. I guarantee you'll feel it.

Now, prepare to be wowed!

VERNE LANGDON INTERVIEW PART ONE...

TWO CHIMPS, THE LION, SOME DRILLERS, AND A GUY NAMED DON



What were some of the masks that you purchased over the years?

The very first Don Post mask I ever owned was a chimp mask in his over-the-head series which consisted of the chimp, a devil, a tramp, and the old man and the old woman. This was when I was in second grade, and a dear family Friend, "Auntie" Florence Ferguson, used to put on a monkey costume - complete with a tail and a Don Post chimp mask - and crack everybody up at parties. I loved that costume so much she made me one, and bought me a Don Post chimp mask to go with it, and we drove people crazy together!

"Auntie Florence and I would put on our monkey costumes and Don Post CHIMP masks and knock ourselves out!"

Her husband, Allyn Sr., owned Ferguson Music House in San Jose, California, where I grew up. He and "Auntie" Florence roomed with my Mom many years before, when Mom and Uncle Allyn played in the orchestra pit for vaudeville acts. A Ferguson Family get-together would always include Mom on cello, "Uncle" Allyn on piano or organ - he was terrific! - my Dad on violin or musical saw, and a few others playing instruments, and "Auntie" Florence and I would go put on our monkey costumes and Don Post chimp masks and knock ourselves out!

By the way, their son, Allyn Ferguson Jr., is a highly-respected contributor in the music industry today, having arranged for Johnny Mathis, Rosemary Clooney, Sarah Vaughn and New York's singing cop, Daniel Rodriguez, plus a myriad of other musical accomplishments. My Mother gave Allyn Jr. his first music lessons.

So in the beginning I had a Don Post chimp mask, and didn't even know it was a "Don Post mask." A few years later I sent away for the devil mask. That, I knew, was a Don Post mask because the ad said so (Honor House or Johnson-Smith & Co.). After the devil mask, I discovered a Frankenstein's Monster over-the-head mask at Dickerson's Toy Store on South First Street in San Jose, and bought it at once (I paid \$2.98 for it). It came in a box, which had the Don Post "comedy & tragedy" signo-logo and a terrific line drawing of The Monster. By then I was in the fourth grade, and within five or six years my wonderful Dad, who always enabled

and empowered me, and I were tracking the "Post-Master."

How and when did you meet Don Post Sr.?

Don Post Sr. and I met right after he moved from Sycamore Avenue in Hollywood, California, into 1122 North La Brea. There's a strip mall there now where the old building used to be, at the corner of La Brea & Santa Monica Boulevard. I had purchased a couple of his masks from a mail-order company and I was into masks and makeup as a kid, so my Dad and I hunted Don down and met with him. I remember buying a shrunken head, one of the props he made for Disneyland's Jungle Cruise ride. Don Post Sr. was quite a grand character!

Dad (Vernon H. Langdon) was an oral surgeon and did all his own lab work, taking impressions of his patients' teeth, making dentures and tooth caps, and even gold bridgework. As a kid I would spend hours in his magical laboratory, working with wax, alginate (then called "Jel-Trate" - pink & peppermint-smelling!), and making things like little turtles and dogs from rubber molds, using Plaster of Paris and Hydrocal. Dad made an impression of my nose and used it to form out of red wax the clown noses I asked for, so I learned lab work and sculpting and how to take full mouth impressions and do life masks at a very early age.

At the time I met Don Sr., I had just entered high school, and it wasn't until a few years later I bought half of Don Post Studios. Don sold me, in his own words, "the lion's share," and Don and I became partners. I started in San Jose-San Francisco radio (station KLOK, 50,000 watts and seventeen different languages, including English) when I was seventeen. In 1963 I was twenty-one and married to Dawn when we moved to Hollywood; Don Post Sr. was 61. I became "Official Co-Owner of Don Post Studios" in January of 1963.

How did you sell Don Sr. on selling you your lion's share? Had you already established some kind of relationship with him at that point?

It really wasn't a matter of "selling" Don on me. Don came to know me, and he liked me, and liked the idea of "new blood" coming in to the business, and perhaps even liked the idea of a transfusion of some "new money" coming in to the business as well. My first day or so at Don Post Studios, I was made aware by the phone company that they intended to turn off our service because their mounting bill had not been paid. Don had failed to mention during our meeting of purchase finalization and contract signing that business was at a current low ebb and the Gods of abundance were ignoring Don Post Studios' bank account. We quickly paid the pink demand, and TRIangle 7-1608 remained in service.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Back in the beginning of our friendship, I was just another customer. Then, we began to correspond. I ordered things from him like foamed heads of his old man and old lady masks for manikins I made for a vintage Model-T at Fabry Motors in San Leandro, CA, where I once worked at the age of twelve washing twenty or so used cars every morning. Those "old folks" figures became the car lot mascots. Pat Fabry, who owned the car lot, ordered quite a few replacements from me (pranksters kept "borrowing" them!) over the years before I moved on to Hollywood.

So Don and I talked on the phone often, and I'd drop him a few lines, he'd write back, I'd write back, and so on. Not a constant kind of thing, but sporadic. By the time I enrolled in college at San Jose State, Don Sr. and I were pen pals. He had become acquainted with my Father (who later was killed in a plane crash - I had just turned seventeen when that happened), and eventually Don met my Mother too. I kept him informed of all my activities, and he was quite interested, and gradually became aware of my capabilities.



Don Sr. displays Don Post Studios products in his North La Brea Avenue shop, where Verne Langdon first met with the creator of "over-the-head" rubber masks. (Photo: Jack B. Kemmerer)

"Don came to know me, and he liked me, and liked the idea of 'NEW BLOOD' coming into the business..."

Around that time I needed to rent a clown outfit because I planned to wear it for a special night at Ida's Fireside Inn on South First Street in San Jose, where I was playing piano bar at the time. The circus was in town, and we were hosting the Polack Bros. clowns. All of us who worked at Ida's - including proprietress Ida Facchino herself - dressed and made up in full clown for the gag. The customers were in on this "clown night" and dressed and made up as well (I created and applied the clown makeup on everyone), so when the clowns came into Ida's after the evening performance, wearing their street clothes and no makeup, there we were, EVERYBODY in the place, all CLOWNS! Those clowns (the real clowns) FREAKED (and believe it or don't, some of them weren't laughing.)

"But I digress." The small place I found to rent my outfit was called VICTORIA'S COSTUME SHOP, now long gone. Victoria Reinke and her partner Bessie were fascinated with the clown nose I had made for myself, and asked me for a dozen or so to sell at their makeup counter. They sold out of those noses faster than I could make and deliver more, so they gave me a small back room that I converted into a makeshift "lab," where I poured & painted clown noses and sculpted a "zombie" type mask, faintly resembling the one with which you're now familiar. We sold maybe twenty at \$19.95 each before I packed it in. I made a few mascot heads for local high schools too.

Several years before, I had created nondescript "horror masks" and even a Celastic gorilla head for my Friend - "America's Foremost Magician & Hypnotist, the One and Only - The Great Toussaint" (nee Benjamin Toussaint) and his "Bedlam of Terrors." At each and every show you could "See Frankenstein in Person," wearing - what else? - a Don Post Frankenstein Monster mask, plus other nondescript horror characters wearing nondescript horror masks created by the Langdon's nondescript son, "weird Verne!" Ben's midnight (or curfew-adjustable) spook show (an illustrious theatrical extravaganza) happened in select small movie houses everywhere, and some big movie houses too! in the '50s and 60s; it was performed "IN PERSON... ON OUR STAGE!!" by Ben & Company, including the afore-mentioned gaggle of Nondescripts, who menacingly tottered and shuffled along in the "Bedlam." Ben Toussaint really was "Great" and one-of-a-kind; his story would make a fun movie!

Anyway, on a trip to Hollywood to meet and interview lush-thrush, angora-throated April Stevens, whose albums I played non-stop on my radio show, I dropped in to visit Don Sr. at the La Brea location. When he asked what I'd been up to and I told him I was making masks in a costume shop, he appeared genuinely hurt and said, "What are you doing, going into competition against me?" Of course I had no such intention, and told him so, and vowed if I ever wanted to get into the mask business I'd join forces with him. He said "That's an idea..." and we left it there.

Several years later - in late 1962 - I made the trip to Hollywood for a lunch date with Don Sr. that would confirm the arrangement that had gradually developed since our somewhat flip conversation in the La Brea shop. By this time he had moved the business out to the valley, and was ready for a new partner, a "college man" as he sometimes referred to me. His old partner, Bill Wayda, was still hanging in, but Don assured me that he would buy back Bill's half of the business and sell it to me. My first couple of weeks at Post, Bill Wayda came in every day as if he knew nothing of my purchase. Then at the end of the second week, Bill Wayda just evaporated, and I never saw him again. I guess Don bought back Bill's "lion's share."

Anyway, Don and I met at Sorrentino's Sea Food Restaurant in Toluca Lake, California, (now gone; there's a Kinko's on the site). We both ordered some very succulent King Crab, and as we enjoyed it I pressed Don for assurance I could earn a living from the business. Don asserted he had made a very good living over the years from his mask business. I distinctly remember him saying "I drive a Cadillac and own my home." And he did. A great big black Cadillac, a beaut, and a dear little house located at 4716 Sunnyslope Avenue



Masters of the masks and notorious

in Sherman Oaks. (I don't believe the residence houses any Post descendants these days, so please do not disturb the occupants). When I asked Don Sr. what my money would actually be buying, that's when he told me "the lion's share" of the business. So I handed over my personal check in the previously-agreed-to sum, and we signed a contract of sale drawn up by his then-attorney and very first TV court show judge, Voltaire Perkins. The contract only specified Don was selling me 50% of Don Post Studios, not "the lion's share." Voltaire Perkins did not mince words.

funsters Verne Langdon & Don Post Sr.
(Photo: Walter J. Daugherty)

My "official title" was "co-owner and partner," later "Vice-President," and finally, after we had all the fun we could stand and I joined Bill Wayda in the Bermuda Triangle, "former-co-owner-partner-Vice-President." That title is current.

Where and how big was the shop then? How big was the crew? How many pieces were they turning out a day?

When I came into the business in January of 1963, Don was renting a 1,500 square foot industrial building (the landlord's name was Elias Djanogly; my wife or I usually made out his check every month) at 5537 Cleon Avenue in North Hollywood, California. Product output would vary from a dozen of something to a gross per day. The "crew" consisted of four people, including Ernesto "Benny" Bianchetti, who hefted and poured all the molds, painted a little, and tried very conscientiously to keep the place clean, and Peggy Clinton, an ample woman with very strong hands, who trimmed skinheads and masks.

"Don painted masks ENDLESSLY while smoking a pack or so of Lucky Strike cigarettes daily."

My first year I discovered Peggy excelled at making gorilla suits when producer Jim Terry contacted us to make an ape outfit for his "Grand Guignol" French-style horror theatre show starring Tom Tryon and Yvette Vickers. Don Sr. sculpted the head, chest, hands and feet, and Peggy sewed the whole outfit! Next we made "Kogar" for Bob Burns. A new head, hands and feet, all sculpted by Don Sr. to look more like Ray "Crash" Corrigan's gorilla per Bob's wishes, and Peggy made that one too plus the other Don Post Studios gorilla outfits, using a great new "hair cloth" we found and bought from Irving "Uncle Izzy" Mendelssohn in New York. Peggy called the gorillas "'drillers." Peggy Clinton was a very talented, dedicated employee, and a real hoot!

Don Sr. did most of the sculpting before I came in, painted masks endlessly, formulated (and breathed-in the fumes of) polyurethane foam and less-caustic latex foam, while smoking a pack or so of Lucky Strike non-filter cigarettes daily, and made life masks (including Peter Lorre's, Christopher Lee's, Tor Johnson's, Buster Keaton's, and even one of me!). Bill Wayda smoked and painted as well, and they all inhaled great quantities of talc (used in the mask curing/drying process) every day. The spray booth was not connected so the air was thick with residue clouds of lacquer, and there was no ventilation save for two windows at one end of the building, and a garage door at the other. Shortly after I arrived at Post I had the spray booth connected.

I put together "The Don Post Private Collection" of life masks, all the stars who had played in "monster movies," including Boris Karloff, Basil Rathbone, Lon Chaney Jr., Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, John Carradine, Charles Laughton, Tor Johnson, and last (and almost never!) Bela Lugosi.

The Lugosi life mask was nearly impossible to find. But I was determined to find it, and I am the knight in tarnished armor who eventually rescued Bela's life mask from probable oblivion. Bela Lugosi has always been one of my faves, and I wanted his life mask - if one even existed - because I wanted his life mask!

I methodically explored every makeup department in Hollywood, including Warner Bros. with Gordon Bau, and the old lab at Universal, with Bud Westmore's help; these expeditions yielded nothing. I learned the studios wouldn't just do a life mask of you because you might possibly be a cult figure someday. Not without a purchase or budget order number, and a show to bill it to, with an okay up front from the producers and/or the studio. The only reason that studio makeup

departments ever took life mask impressions was if appliances were to be made, or a dummy head of the star was required. But the extra expense of a life mask and appliances usually dictated the alternate use of stunt-doubles who - with costume and wig - looked enough like their acting counterparts to pass on medium or long shots, with close-ups of the actors interwoven into the action.

Bela's friend and agent, Don Marlowe, revealed some years after Bela's passing that Universal had cast actor Ian Keith to essay the role of "Dracula" in "Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein," and only when a persistent Marlowe stormed the office of a studio head and demanded that Bela Lugosi be signed to play "Dracula" did the studio drop Keith and hire Lugosi, a mere five days before shooting began. There was no reason for a life mask to be done of Bela, and Bud Westmore would have loaned me the mask if he had it.

After a year or so, I finally found Bela's life mask in Columbia Studios' makeup lab, where expert lab technician/makeup artist Clay Campbell had immortalized the 61-year-old Lugosi's classic countenance for the great special makeup effects finale in "Return of the Vampire" (Columbia Pictures, 1943). Columbia's Makeup Department Head, Ben Lane, thought it was a life mask of Paul Muni. I assured him it wasn't, and borrowed it. I still have it. Ben is retired now, but I bet he often wonders whatever happened to that life mask of "Paul Muni."

A full 3/4 mask, it includes Bela's ears and neck, down to his collarbone. Lugosi was said to have been claustrophobic, and it was the only mask ever taken of him. EVER. I know for a fact. If any other Lugosi life mask had existed, I would have unearthed it. In 1968 John Chambers borrowed the life mask from me, explaining that Universal didn't have a life mask of Bela Lugosi and they wanted one to display on their Universal Studios Tour. Werner Keppler in Universal's makeup department made a mold from which a copy was cast. Somehow somebody got to it and "lifted" a copy from the duplicate that Werner made for Universal, and now it's all over eBay and everywhere else. But I've got the original, with some of Bela's eyelashes still stuck in it! P.S. When Johnny returned the life mask to me, I couldn't help but notice that someone in Universal's Makeup Department had identified it by printing - inside the back of the mask with a thick, black permanent marker - "B. LAGOSI." It only makes you wonder how they would have spelled "Paul Muni."

Don loved this little collection of life masks. I took an impression of his face and appropriately included his mask in the "Don Post Private Collection." We even did a life mask of Forry Ackerman, and gave Forry a complete set of copies, including his own mask.

Speaking of Bela Lugosi's life mask, and just for the record, Pat Newman sculpted every detail of all our "Dracula" masks - by eye and hand. Her only references for these works were the photos Universal supplied, and a few pictures of Dracula from Bela's own private collection, which Hope Lininger Lugosi had given to me in 1956, shortly after Bela's passing. The rumor that Don Post Studios was "provided a copy" of Bela's life mask to develop the Dracula mask is incorrect; nothing could be further from the truth. I retrieved the only life mask of Bela ever taken, for the sole purpose of adding it to our "Don Post Private Collection" of life masks, some time after Pat had completed two or three versions of Dracula.

Donald Jr. is very generous with his acknowledgements of my contributions to Don Post Studios, but lest we forget, it was his Father, Don Sr., who was the creator of Don Post Studios, starting out many years before with a mask of "Esky" the Esquire Magazine mascot, then his masks of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, "The Dictators," and Edgar Bergen's Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd. These were all very popular too. He sold them at Marshall Field's in Chicago, and they were "over-the-head."

Don was quite a guy. He even tried to teach me how to play the ponies (an "art" in itself; I never really learned, once overlooking a horse named "Vernie's Choice," which of course came in first and paid ten to one! That did it. Don



Don Post peeks over Famous Monsters while the Post Studios custom ape prepares to answer a Captain Company ad. Ape face & chest were sculpted by Verne Langdon from a clay press from a waste mold of Charlie Gemora's ape face master. (Photo by J. Barry Herron)

finally gave up on me in the horse department). During the "busy season" Don's wife Louise (a great Lady) would come in and help trim, and I would use Don Jr. as a model (he posed wearing our "Pro Bald Cap," and without a doubt was the VERY BEST-LOOKING "bald kid" I've ever seen). Don Jr. was incredibly photogenic (he still is), and more than once I tried to talk him into an acting career, but he just didn't feel acting was for him. Now that I know a good many actors, Jr. was probably right!

What do you remember most about that time?

There are so many memories! Dawn, then my wife (now my former wife but always my very best Friend) and I working all alone until midnight many times, filling orders and eating baloney sandwiches, the excitement of the creation of each new mask, and the recognition in FAMOUS MONSTERS magazine, the live shows produced by L. Strock Rupert and his "Stunt Stars from Screenland" with Sid Koss which we performed with Tor Johnson at Uni-Marts around Southern California, and all the people and situations throughout the five years I was making my dreams come true (everything that came out of Don Post Studios during my time there was something I wanted for myself!). Everyone from Tor Johnson and Felix Silla to Korla Pandit and Glenn Strange visited the studios. Edgar Bergen, Paul Winchell, Janos Prohaska, George Barrows, Ray "Crash" Corrigan, Peter Lorre and my dear Friend the legendary Mae West... the list goes on and on. It was not easy stepping into that business, but we emphasized quality, and with quality and lots of "elbow grease," we did alright.

You mentioned the recognition in Famous Monsters. Did Post stuff begin selling in FM during your time? What was it? Did Warren buy wholesale from you and then sell retail? I'd love to hear a little about the DP Studios/Warren Publication relationship.

I was entirely responsible for the Warren-Post connection. In March of 1963 I began taking out ads for our masks in GENII, THE CONJUROR'S MAGAZINE, then published by my Friend Bill Larsen Jr. Bill and brother Milt's Father, William Larsen Sr. - a celebrated criminal defense attorney of the time - originated Genii, and combined it with another publication, The Conjuror's Magazine, started by the famous Harry Houdini, hence the evolution of GENII, THE CONJUROR'S MAGAZINE.

"Product output would vary from a dozen of something to a gross per day. The 'CREW' consisted of four people."

Every magician and wanna-be magician and kid-into-magic-like-me read the publication, which came out monthly. Magic dealers such as Golden Gate Magic, Abbott's, Owen Bros., and Taylor-Made Magic - Bud & Merv Taylor, who later, with their partner Bob Hume, developed and operated Disneyland's Main Street Magic, Merlin's Magic and the Magicland Magic Shop in Disneyland's Hotel where our "Universal Horrors" line premiered - all advertised in Genii.

I knew if the magicians saw our ads they would send their orders in to us, which they did, but I also let the dealers know their inquiries were welcome. Most magicians asked their dealers about our masks, the dealers wrote to us and stocked the masks, and we sold a whole lot of masks!

Our first ad was for a "Magic Bunny" mask (\$15.00) which did alright. Then came Dracula in April of '63, sculpted by Pat Newman. This mask sold for \$25.00, was made of thick latex rubber, and had a zipper down the back.

Next, in May of '63, a black face/black hair with silver highlights "Wolfman." Zipper down the back. \$25.00. I modeled it and J. Barry Herron (our "Official Photographer" by now) did the "shoot." June of '63 saw "Phantom of the Opera," and the ad header simply stated "HOLLYWOOD HORRORS!"

In July of '63 we sprang the HOLLYWOOD HORRORS! series of extra thick latex monster character masks which included Frankenstein's Monster, Count Dracula, The Wolfman, The Mummy, Phantom of the Opera, and Mr. Hyde. \$25.00 each with zippers down the back, all sculpted by Pat Newman, except for Frankenstein's Monster (somewhat Karloffian, originally sculpted by Don Sr. and poured in very thick rubber with a zipper down the back for spook

show entrepreneur Joe Karston pre-me), and the Wolfman which I had urged him to sculpt.

In December of 1963 we made a polyurethane-foamed "Monster Headpiece" and neck bolts advertised in Genii for \$35.00 and modeled by me. Clown wigs, masks, feet, shoes, and even rubber chickens appeared in the Genii ads too, plus character masks in April of 1964 and Professional Ape Outfits (who in his right mind would want an "Amateur" one!) from \$450.00, hand sewn by Peggy Clinton!

In June of 1964 in our monthly Genii ad we unfurled the Don Post Studios Monsters, which included Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, The Mummy, Phantom of the Opera, Mr. Hyde, and The Wolfman. These retailed for \$8.95 each.

I had read Famous Monsters ever since buying "#1 The Collector's Edition" in January of 1958 at Fred Volz's Creamery in San Jose, California, where I grew up (so to speak), close to James Lick where I attended high school. I remember that first cover: Jim Warren, himself, was wearing a Post "over-the-head, borrowed personality" green \$3.95 (by then) Frankenstein Monster mask and tux, and Marion Moore was wearing glossed fire-engine red lipstick and a very snug-fitting and nicely-low-cut black cocktail dress!



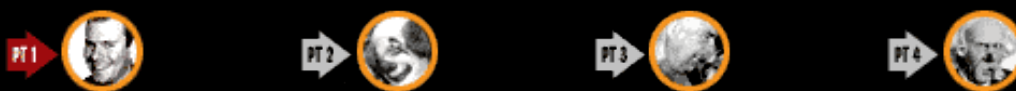
Don Post, model Enrique Nieves, and Verne Langdon show off the Herman Munster Headpiece. Nieves was also employed at Don Post Studios as hairstylist to the masks. (Photo: Jerry Smith)

I had always admired the FM logo, so I unwittingly cut it out and used the "MONSTERS" part of the registered copyrighted "FAMOUS MONSTERS" logo for the eye-catching header on the new over-the-head-masks monster series ad. I had a bunch of fliers made up, and sent these out to novelty and costume shops everywhere. I also sent one to the publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine, one James Warren, whom I had never met in my life.

A week or so later, I received a personal letter from Mr. James Warren, publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine, succinctly explaining to me that he had always wanted to own a mask company, and inasmuch as I had violated certain United States copyright laws by "borrowing" his magazine's logo for our ad, his attorneys would be seeing us in court. Then he added (much to my relief), that if I wanted to avoid such a confrontation, I should contact Ben Taubman, the Captain of the Captain Company, and make arrangements to sell our masks in the magazine.

After I changed into a dry set of trousers, I post-haste telephoned Mr. Taubman (actually Jim's Father - Jim was born a Taubman), and he was very nice and we agreed to do business. I never "borrowed" anything again, except the "Paul Muni" life mask, and Jim and I embarked upon an etched-in-granite ongoing friendship that lasts to this very day.

So the Don Post monster masks began appearing in Warren Publishing Company's FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND magazine before the end of 1964. We wholesaled to them the less-expensive half and over-the-head original Frankenstein's Monster masks, and then the new over-the-head monsters (and Munsters too), but when we came out with the "Universal Horrors" ("Calendar Monsters" as they have come to be known), we drop-shipped. Captain Company would send us their label, already addressed, with their check for each mask plus postage and handling, and we would make the mask, pack it and ship it.



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The logo consists of the letters 'BOM' in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font, centered within a red, horizontally-oriented oval shape.

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